

# **EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT**

**East Providence City Hall**

**145 Taunton Avenue**

**East Providence, Rhode Island 02914**

## **School Committee Meeting**

**September 9, 2008**

### **Open Session**

**Mrs. Morris called the meeting to order at 6:00PM. All School Committee members were present: Anthony Carcieri, Robert Faria, Stephen DeCastro, Steven Santos, Mildred Morris. Also present: Dr. Mario Cirillo, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Edward Daft, Assistant Superintendent, Daniel Kinder, Esq.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Carcieri to convene in Executive Session for purposes of discussing Collective Bargaining: Teachers' Contract (R.I. Gen. Laws § Section 42-46-5 (a) (1)(b) Litigation (R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-5 (a) (2), seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 5-0**

**The School Committee returned to Open Session at 7:50PM. Motion was made by Mr. Faria to return to public session, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

**The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and a Moment of Silence were observed.**

**Minutes of Previous Meetings – A motion was made by Mr. Faria to approve, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

**Student/Teacher Recognition - Mr. Lonnie Barham, Director of Human Resources, congratulated and commended teachers reaching tenure; certificates will be awarded at a school ceremony.**

**Chair' s Report – Mrs. Morris reported that the Townie Pride Parade will be held on October 3rd and a reception for the Superintendent on September 17th at the High School. Mrs. Morris and the Vice Chair visited schools and attended the opening day convocation; Mrs. Morris thought the opening of school was very successful and commended everyone for a fine opening.**

**School Committee Comments – None**

**Communications**

**Sub-Committee Reports – Mr. Faria reported that the negotiations committee met with the East Providence Education Association and will continue to schedule more dates and provide reports going forward.**

## **Report of Superintendent and Staff**

**Educational Program Report - NEASC Report – East Providence High School – Dr. Cirillo asked Mr. Daft and Dr. Caswell to provide an overview of the report. Dr. Cirillo commented that the accreditation process is rigorous and a great amount of work takes place before the visit; he commended administrators and teachers for a very fine report; areas of education were commended along with some facilities recommendations. Mr. Daft reported that although this is a final report, it must be approved by RIDE before final accreditation; the report showcased the hard work of Dr. Caswell and staff. There are some areas which need to be addressed regarding the facilities. Dr. Caswell presented some of the commendations and recommendations. NESDEC, the accreditation agency, visited along with administrators from other states who spent three days in the high school gathering data. Staff prepared one and a half years in advance of the visit and follow up reports are required. Seven standards are listed in the report and school leadership reviews all recommendations and commendations. Dr. Caswell gave some examples of the commendations and recommendations and it is expected that we will receive accreditation. Mrs. Morris thanked everyone for the report, recognizing the hard work which goes into this process.**

**Report on the Opening of School – Dr. Cirillo reinforced Mrs. Morris' comments; he and Mr. Daft visited schools observing an atmosphere**

of energy and commitment; schools were very positive. He visited class rooms at the High School and communicated with students. From elementary to High School, students seemed happy to be back and working. Everyone hit the ground running and the convocation was a success.

Dr. Cirillo asked Mr. Rodericks, Director of Registration to report on Kindergarten enrollment. Mr. Rodericks reported that there were a few snags the first week of school, but all K students were placed without hiring any additional staff and he thanked the nine or ten families who experienced a delay in placing their students. He provided a breakdown of registrations to the School Committee. Mr. Faria commended the principals for doing a fabulous job and for their professionalism. Dr. Cirillo echoed his support for the administrators.

Mr. Raymond Linneman, Transportation Specialist, reported on a good start for schools; we transport approximately 4000 students to about 73 schools but have not changed the number of buses used.

## **Personnel Recommendations**

## **SUPERINTENDENT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

## **APPOINTMENTS**

**Jerome Baron School Specialist, Administration and Finance**

**Motion: Mr. Carcieri/Second: Mr. Faria. Discussion: Mr. DeCastro mentioned the ongoing consolidation process with the city and how this position would fit into that process along with objecting to the salary for this position. Mr. Faria said there was no contract or terms committed to for this position and he concurs that there should be a provision for the consolidation with the city. Mrs. Morris cannot agree with the salary for this position while we are in deficit; it is much higher than the person who left. Mr. Carcieri asked Mr. Barham about the selection process for the position. Mr. Barham explained that the position was advertised and the screening committee interviewed the top four candidates and recommended two to the Superintendent who also interviewed both candidates. The salary of \$110,000 is commensurate with three decades of experience, a proven track record and experience in handling financial difficulties in other communities. Roll call Vote: Mr. Carcieri, aye; Mr. DeCastro, nay; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mrs. Morris, nay. Mr. Carcieri said we are in serious condition and need someone of his caliber next to the Superintendent during labor negotiations; if you want expertise and experience we have to pay for that; we should not be worrying about this now while we are looking at a tremendous deficit. Mr. DeCastro asked if the salary was advertised; an interim is OK with him as hiring would tell the city we are not interested in consolidation.**

<b>Maria Mansella</b>	<b>ELL Program Coordinator (3/5</b>	<b>Coordinator-2/5</b>
<b>ESL Teacher</b>		
<b>ESL Teacher)</b>		

**Bernadette Moonan   Kindergarten, Full Day, Oldham**  
**1 year only**

**Ashley Stringfellow   Kindergarten, Full Day, Hennessey**  
**1 year only**

**Christine Reposa    Head Teacher – Hennessey**

**Phil McCormick   Testing Coordinator – Hennessey**

**Leanne Ayotte**    **Supervisory Assistant, Kent Heights**

**Isabel Evans**    **Supervisory Assistant, School TBD**

**Maria George    Supervisory Assistant, Oldham**

**Stephanie Munro** Supervisory Assistant, Oldham

**Dianne Newton**    **Supervisory Assistant, Waddington**

**Corey Massey**    **Coach, Boys' Jr. Varsity Soccer,**    **EPHS**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. DeCastro. Vote 5-0.**

## RETIREMENTS

**Robert Geremia    3/5th SBC Coordinator/2/5th Senior Project Seminar**

## **Instructor (Applied Learning)**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos Vote 5-0.**

## **RESIGNATIONS**

**Kevin O'Grady Social Studies Teacher**

**(Has been on Extended Personal Leave)**

**Judith Alves Safety Patrol Coordinator, Orlo**

**Nancy MacDonald Soccer Cheerleading Coach, RMS**

**Nancy MacDonald Basketball Cheerleading Coach, RMS**

**Robert Geremia Assistant Coach, Hockey, EPHS**

**Robert Geremia Head Coach, Golf – EPHS**

**Motion: Mr. Santos/Second: Mr. Faria. Vote 5-0.**

## **LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Laura Laviano Special Ed, Resource, MMS**

**Approx. September 23, 2008**

**Andrea Sprout Half-day Kindergarten Teacher, Waddington**

**Marcia Vallese One year from Special Education Teacher**

**Self Contained, Waddington**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

**Financial Report – Mr. DeCastro asked about tuition expenditures; the estimated spending is less than what is shown in the budget. Mr. Ken Beaton, Interim Finance Department, explained there was a change in**

activity over the last several months; this report was put together quickly; it is \$1.9 over budget. He explained that the 7.4 is based on the number of students and where they are located at this point in time. This was a snapshot when the budget was prepared; the \$7 million is the current estimate; the other estimate was May and June; he was not here at that time.

## **Unfinished Business**

**Early Admission to Kindergarten – Amended Policy - Second Passage – Motion to accept by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

**School Uniforms - Mrs. Morris asked for an update. Dr. Cirillo said there was somewhat of a push for this at the school level but not a lot of support district wide. Although this is not a priority on his list, he will be attending PTA meetings/open houses and will try to get a sense on what the feelings are on this subject.**

**FY 2008-09 Budget – Second Passage – Motion by Mr. Carcieri to accept the budget, seconded by Mr. Faria for discussion. Mr. DeCastro said he was the lone vote at the last meeting against the budget; he had copies available of changes he would like to recommend in attempting to live within the 3 1/2 % cap and asking the city for that amount (3.48% increase) There is a deficit reduction plan**



in place and meetings have taken place with City Council and School Committee to wipe that out. City Manager is working on a plan to resolve it; when adding these up, it is a 6.74% increase. On expenditure side, he did not change salaries, but made a significant cut on health insurance for over \$2 million in savings; he feels that we are in negotiations and hopefully, this would be attainable. On tuitions, he proposed a 15% cut which is still higher than the budget from the amount budgeted last year (25%). On the transportation line , he cut 10% which had a 30% increase over last year. The legal budget is high at \$350,000 when the entire legal budget for the city is \$430,000; it does not make sense where we are; he analyzed hours for legal; The City Council and School Committee should work together to wipe out the deficit of \$3.2.

Mr. Carcieri noted glaring inconsistencies; a 20% co-pay is an assumptive cut; reductions are being made and we are reducing legal fee and services to try to get 20% steadfastly refused by the union. Carcieri asked legal counsel if we can delay enacting budget tonight. Discussion: Mr. Kinder advised the process is by charter and is late now and there is a need to get the budget to the City Council. Mr. Carcieri asked what would the result of delaying this.

Mr. DeCastro cannot support this budget and laid out cuts succinctly; he voted against this before and he presented some cuts at this meeting.

**Mr. Carcieri explained that the person we hired (Business Manager) will be on this tomorrow morning; we will send it to the City Council and we will have a financial person in the mix; this should be done sooner than later.**

**Dr. Cirillo is meeting with the City Manager on Friday; he cautioned School Committee that some cuts are assumptive and may not bear reality; this is what got the school budget into trouble before; a \$1.8 million dollar line for health insurance was cut with good intentions, but the concessions did not materialize with the unions and the \$1.8 had to be added back to the budget; it was a cut in name only. On special education transportation and tuitions, a cut of \$630,000 was made and it never materialized; we must be very careful of assumptive cuts which never materialize. Mr. Carcieri said you can only look at what you have in hand; Mr. DeCastro said it is not prudent to ask taxpayers for more money.**

**Mr. Carcieri said he has only been here three months and the Superintendent for a few weeks, but we have bills to pay and he recommends putting the numbers on the table; this is no dream budget, it is a reality budget all laid out. He wants to deal with it; if someone can do better, he is a city of East Providence taxpayer and East Providence owes this money; he asked what everyone would like to do, as he has no answers but realizes the need for a proper course of action which includes bringing a financial guy to the table.**

**Mr. Faria talked about the transfer of numbers to the city side; they met with City Council and the School Committee and he does not think we have the power to do that. Mr. DeCastro said he is looking at it in a different manner and asked for consensus from the parties; there is a commitment from the City Manager to eliminate the deficit. Mr. Carcieri would like to bring everyone together including the Superintendent, City Manager and the new finance person. Mrs. Morris sent a letter, but the City Council refused to meet with us because of the budget. Mr. Carcieri said we can't forget about the existing deficit; we need to stop all these practices and start fresh; we can't keep rolling it over; he would like to get real numbers. Mr. Faria said last year we cut tuitions hoping for relief from the state and received very little assistance; no relief from collective bargaining either and we budgeted those items for cuts. There are maintenance cuts at the high school and there were needs we should have put money into. Mr. DeCastro said that his cuts are still above last years budget numbers.**

**Mr. Faria said we need to make a commitment; the City Council will not meet with us; Oldham School has the same leaks as last year; the high school has the same facility issues; this is serious work which needs to be done and we have to make a commitment to them; none of the opportunities came through last year. No one from City Council or anyone supported this; our solicitor represents another School Department. Mr. Faria asked for consolidation of legal services two years ago from the city and we are now walking into a**

bees nest. Mrs. Morris said the city would have had to hire an additional person for legal if we consolidated, per Mr. Conley, the City Solicitor. Mr. DeCastro said the legal budget is \$430,000 for the City.

Mr. Santos felt this was moving money from the right pocket to the left pocket; the School Committee does not have taxing ability, the \$3.2 deficit is not going away, and there is no final agreement as to how to solve this. We can maybe sell buildings, but that won't even make a dent because the real estate numbers talked about are not real in the current market. The cuts Mr. DeCastro proposes are not real cuts but are based on his analysis. The City Council took another \$560,000 from the budget. Back in the beginning of the year, he asked legal counsel what we should do not to deficit spend; he asked the Superintendent to take action to do what was possible and it was defeated by Mr. DeCastro and Mrs. Morris. There were a couple of meetings and it went no where; no one likes this budget and we need to get people to solve this problem. This is a citywide problem; they do not want to look at this; everyone needs to be involved; these are pie in the sky concessions.

Mr. Carcieri would like the assumptive cuts to be real; the problem is, there is no money going back into the schools which are in varying stages of disrepair. We just deal with them as they come up with bare minimum; we have not addressed that problem and need to get involved with elected officials, financial people, to turn East Providence around and in the right direction. This will get worse

each year; if there are leaks, we cannot shut the door and pretend it is not happening; we need to fix it now. Mr. DeCastro said the student population is down, buildings need work, we have a strategic plan, why not use a bond issue to fix the building and get support from the public.

Dr. Cirillo agreed for a need for a faculties bond issue; he does not support this budget but given the reality of where we are with a \$9 million accumulating deficit, we are in violation of state law and cannot continue; there are ways of getting out of it, but we cannot take assumptive cuts; this budget does not address the cuts that did not materialize. The Department did not stop spending but stopped paying the bills and if this was your house, we know what the result would be; we are self insured and claims have to be paid; there is very little discretionary money in budget. We need to face that and what we will we do to stop violating the law.

Attorney Kinder advised that state law prohibits a School Committee from ending the year with a budget deficit and it is too late to cut three million dollars from the budget; this budget is designed to avert another deficit which is against the law. The School Committee did not want to go to court to order the city to give more money; the Chair sent a letter to the city to try to negotiate it out; the law says you cannot have a deficit. The School Committee tried to take a corrective action plan and the city assisted, but it was not approved by the Auditor General and nothing was done to solve the deficit

problem. The statutes go on to say courts can approve a higher budget than under cap if the proposal is ambiguous; we have a serious problem which needs to be put on the table and one of two alternatives the law provides not to have a deficit did not work last year. Mr. DeCastro has a problem suing the city to get money back and spending legal fees while doing it. Roll call vote: Mr. Carcieri, aye; Mr. DeCastro, nay; Mr. Faria, aye, Mr. Santos, aye, Mrs. Morris, aye. Vote 4-1.

Mr. Fahey asked why no discussion on the budget as in the past. He feels 5-6 years ago he came here always talking about conflict and tension the School Committee functions under; this has to be resolved and put in perspective once and for all. The Committee should reject the budget because simply the budget is illegal and forced on the City Council. The community knows the political game of who is to blame; we all knew it was coming; the community gets squeezed, students get squeezed. The School Committee knows it is sheer nonsense; he asked where is the political will. He asked that the School Committee support the laws of the state and reject the budget.

Thomas Weygand, an attorney, talked about the laws and the contradictions of laws; the School Committee is required to follow statute 16-2-9 duties of School Committees which requires that the School Committee cannot carry a deficit year to year. The budget adopted by any School Committee shall not propose appropriations

in excess of 105% of the prior year's budget; he submits that to propose this to the City Council, the School Committee is acting outside of authority unlawfully; he would not proceed without a detailed legal opinion. He noted references to Caruolo, which a judge has to consider.

## **New Business**

### **Payment of Bills**

**Warrant #851 dated 9/5/08 - \$1,771,949.86**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

### **Public Comment**

Kathy Blackmar, 127 Palmer Avenue –talked about an incident at the High School yesterday which she heard about on the news; she felt that parents should be notified about any incidents through ConnectEd system. Dr. Cirillo was made aware of situation; he had a meeting with the Assistant Superintendent and the Principal; it was really not the purpose to put everything on ConnectEd and a letter to parents might be a better choice in the future. The media blew the incident out of proportion. Mr. Faria agrees with communicating with parents next time.

Mr. Kenneth Walker, 399 Brown Street spoke about the controversy

over the budget. He was disappointed that written information was not available for the audience when the Superintendent interviews were conducted; he has no qualms with Dr. Cirillo's appointment, but he is deeply interested in the leadership of the schools and in the future when appointing the school leader the general public should have some written information before the interview.

Patti Streit, Indian Road, suggested the website as another avenue to get communication out to parents.

Roberta Brady, Read Street, asked if consideration was given for a timeline for early admission to Kindergarten; a week or less for notification is wrong and unthoughtful to children; she has a concern about that since 12 families were caught off guard this year.

Mr. DeCastro hoped the Registration office will say no guarantee on early admission until after the opening of school and is proactive about space availability; telling people in advance is wrong and the Superintendent should check on the notification process.

A motion was made by Mr. Carcieri to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Faria.  
Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



**Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant**

**Steven Santos, Clerk of the Committee**